

Investigating the Status of Black Women in Brazil: Beyond Housekeepers and Samba Dancers

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Abstract : The construction of the material world involves a series of social power relations. These relations, in a way, can dictate, shape, judge and drive the profiles of so-called 'ideal' individuals. Gender relations, as power relations, are defined based on hierarchies, obediences and inequalities, and male domination seems, with few exceptions, to be rooted in every society around the world. The profile of the Brazilian woman, beyond patriarchal and market determinations, is strongly subjected to media products. Women are, numerically, the majority in Brazilian society. The social indicators point to slight advances in terms of years of study and professional qualification, as well as access to the job market; yet, differences in opportunity and conditions — often explained through the 'unquestionable' cultural rancidness argument — still hinder women's ability to reach and keep job positions. These inequalities are also visible in everyday interactions and in gender relations, and they become greater once race is added to the analysis. For a black woman, her racial origins may play a part in determining the construction of her gender roles. In these terms, there is need to investigate the racial character of the sexual differences within a larger social process of naturalization and justification of cultural hierarchies. Thus, the goal of this study is to identify and discuss the media-built image of black women in Brazil. Furthermore, it is necessary to seek views different than those of the ruling classes. The study uses a qualitative approach based on the feminist standpoint, which intends to hold women's experiences as central. The body of the research — images taken from the Internet — was treated through critical content analysis. The results show that in Brazil the profile of black women, beyond the machist and sexist generalizations, objectifies them or sees them as servants, always at the disposal of non-blacks. It is necessary to overcome the history of this nation, always considering the contribution of these women to the growth and development of places and societies. This can be done through the acknowledgement and highlighting of the few black women who were able to overcome the many barriers in their path and reach leadership position in the country. There are still many important challenges in the way of finding affirmative policies and reaching a more equal society in terms of gender and race; a serious and firm political commitment seems sine qua non.

Keywords : black woman, feminist standpoint, markings, objectification

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